The Circular Datestamps and Provisional Markings of The Queensland's Travelling Post Offices

What is a TPO?

TPO is an acronym for a Travelling Post Office or in other words a railway carriage. Other abbreviations used include RPO (Railway Post Office) or MPO (Mobile Post Office).

The History.

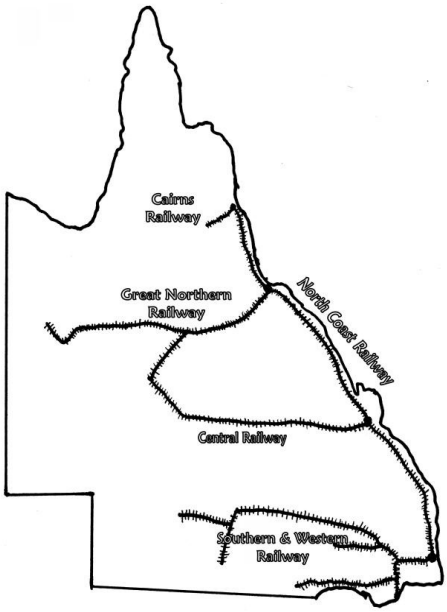
Queensland is the second largest of the Australian States with a total area of 1,727,000 sq. km. The first railroad opened in 1865 connecting Ipswich with the township of Grandchester. As the railroad grew so did the demands for mail transport, particularly to the far flung goldfields and pastoral settlements. At first, the guards on the trains were responsible for the handling of the mail, however as this task began to interfere with their normal duties it was decided to introduce fully manned mail vans. These travelling post offices (TPOs) officially began service on 1 January 1877 and the last ones were removed from service in August of 1932.

The Railways.

Ten railway lines were in use during the TPO period. Five of these railways used provisional TPO markings and five of these railways provided a regular TPO service, as follows:

- Southern & Western Railway (provisional & regular)
- Central Railway (provisional & regular)
- Great Northern Railway (provisional & regular)
- North Coast Railway (regular only)
- Cairns Railway (regular only)
- Maryborough Railway (provisional only)
- Bundaberg Railway (provisional only)

All except the North Coast Railway ran inland from a port on the coast. The North Coast Railway then joined all the ports so that it was then possible to travel by rail from an outback town to any major coastal city.



The Postmarks.

This exhibit deals with the provisional and circular date stamps (CDS) markings of the Queensland TPOs up to the cessation of the TPO service in 1932. The provisional markings are virtually unknown on cover and only a handful of examples are known on stamps. The TPO CDSs are almost always found on low denomination stamps because heavy items were carried by the railway parcel service, which had its own stamps. The TPO CDSs are much more prevalent as transit markings and backstamps, however they are keenly sought as the prime cancellation on cover. This exhibit displays a number of such examples. The TPO's also used a number of other markings such as numeral and registered cancellations, however these are outside the scope of this exhibit. Postmark identification is that used by Campbell in the book "Queensland Postal History", except in the case of new discoveries. Where multiple examples are shown on cover they are as a backstamp, as a primary cancellation or represent different rates and destinations.

This Exhibit.

Frame 1
S & W Rwy Provisionals
& TPO # 1, 2, 3
2 only recorded examples
4 less than 5 copies known

Frame 2
S & W Rwy TPO # 3,4 & 5
3 only recorded examples
4 less than 5 copies known

Frame 3
S & W Rwy TPO # 6
Central Rwy TPO # 1
2 only recorded examples
2 less than 5 copies known

Frame 4
Central Rwy TPO #1 & 2
Great Northern Rwy TPO # 1 & 2
North Coast Rwy TPO # 1
2 only recorded examples
4 less than 5 copies known

Frame 5
North Coast Rwy TPO # 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
Cairns Rwy
Maryborough Rwy
2 only recorded examples
2 less than 5 copies known